



Couple's seating request draws DA objections

By **Scott Smith**

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STOCKTON - Two men who are married to each other and charged with a Tracy woman's murder asked a judge Monday if they can sit side by side in court to coordinate their defense.

Robert and Jorge Morgan entered pleas of not guilty. But their courtroom seating - and not their alleged crime - dominated the brief hearing. Bailiffs put Robert Morgan, 39, and Jorge Morgan, 24, in the jury box separated by two empty seats.

"We're not actually getting a fair defense," Robert Morgan told the judge, accusing a prosecutor of twisting the situation. "It's funny how the DA brings up the sexual thing."

The couple is charged with stabbing 58-year-old Cynthia Ramos to death Aug. 6 in her own home in Tracy where she lived. They're also charged with robbery and lying in wait, which could land them in prison for life.

San Joaquin County Deputy District Attorney Valli Israels said she worried the couple were asking to be housed together at the jail, which is why she presented the judge with information about prison rape in her argument against the defendants' request.

Citing the Prison Rape Elimination Act of 2003, Israels said inmates at risk of having sex cannot be housed together.

"It's unclear what sort of contact they're asking for," Israels said after the hearing. She added that her main concern was security, given recent problems in the Stockton courthouse.

San Joaquin County Superior Court Judge Bernard Garber set a full hearing for next week when he will take up the issue. Garber made no rulings, but said inmates are typically allowed to talk in court.

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